

The Prediction of University Students' Willingness to Seek Counseling*

Serdar ERKAN

Saskatchewan University

Zeynep CİHANGİR-ÇANKAYA^a

Ege University

Yaşar ÖZBAY

Gazi University

Şerife TERZİ

Gazi University

Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine the variables that qualify the help seeking behavior (willingness to seek counseling) of Turkish university students. A total of 5829 college students (2974 females, 2841 males, 14 unknown) from eleven universities in Turkey have participated in the study. Personal Form, Self Concealment Scale, Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale, Problem Areas Scale, Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, Multi-Dimensional Perceived Social Support Scale, Bem Sex Role Inventory have been used in the research. Moreover, the hierarchic regression analysis technique has been used in the analysis of the data. It is observed that the study has significantly predicated the points gathered from independent variables with the points related to willingness to seek help. This finding shows that independent variables can be regarded as explaining the 26 % variance related to the help seeking behavior points. The results show that the most significant predictor of college students' willingness to seeking psychological help level is positive attitudes towards seeking psychological help.

Key Words

Psychological Help Seeking, Willingness to Seek Counseling, Self Concealment, Gender Roles.

Being at a transition stage between puberty and young adulthood; college students have to cope with certain problems brought by college life as well as trying to accomplish their developmental tasks. In this context, there are a lot of researches about university students problems in Turkey (Akaydin, 2002; Erdoğan, Şanlı, & Bekir, 2005; Karagüven, 2001; Özbay, 1997; Türk Üniversite Gençliği

Araştırması, 2003; Ültanır, 1998). In the researches which is made in Turkey usually focused on education, unemployment, freedom, communication, confidence, identification, adaptation, parental issues, sexual issues, generation conflict, anxiety, economic issues, While they can sometimes solve these problems by themselves, it might also be the case that they feel the need to seek help from their parents, peers, teachers or specialists. In this respect, they show some help seeking behavior. As indicated by Fischer and Turner (1970), help seeking behavior refers to the extent to which a person utilizes different external sources against a situation that threatens his or her normal life functions, in order to reach or reestablish equilibrium.

Upon realizing problems, people attempt to solve them; for example with the help of social support resources (Wivell & Webb, 1995). Primarily, people choose to receive help from their close relatives or family; and if this does not work well they shift to professional help (Hinson & Swanson, 1993). In

* This research is a part of university students problem areas and help seeking behaviours study which is sported by TÜBİTAK and completed in 2009.

a **Zeynep CİHANGİR-ÇANKAYA, PhD.**, is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Educational Sciences, Guidance and Psychological Counseling. Her research interests include school counseling, well being, and personal and social skills programs. Correspondence: Assist. Prof. Zeynep Cihangir Cankaya, Ege University, Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, İzmir/Turkey. E-mail: zeynep.cihangir.cankaya@ege.edu.tr Phone: +90 232 311 10 10/5256.

other words, people generally see professional help like psychological counseling as a last option and seek it only if their own efforts to solve their problems are not fruitful (Cramer, 1999; Sherbourne, 1988; Wivell & Webb, 1995). Saunders (1993) has pointed that people's decision processes related to professional help seeking have some similarities. He proposed a four step model suggesting that clients first recognize they have a problem; then they decide that counseling might help them solve it; next they decide to seek counseling; and, finally, they contact a specific counseling agency or counselor for help.

There are different reasons why people display help seeking behavior. Some do it because of their fears, weaknesses, and failure while others are voluntary to express their problems to a professional (Özbay, 1997). Unhealthy psychology, high frequency of stressful and unwanted events, intensive health problems, and a lack of social support creates a need for help seeking behavior (Philips & Murrell, 1994).

These factors that affect individuals' help seeking behavior can be analyzed by help seeking models. One of these is Cramer's model that is a composite of Kelly and Achter (1995) and Cepeda-Benito and Short's (1998) regression models. In this model, the help seeking behavior of college students has been defined as a function of four psychological variables (Lioa, Rounds, & Klein, 2005):

- a. Attitudes towards seeking counseling.
- b. Available social support
- c. Distress
- d. Self-concealment (Larson & Chastain, 1990)

Kelly and Achter (1995) and Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998) have assessed the influence of these four variables on help seeking behavior and have concluded that self concealment and help seeking attitudes are significant predicates for help seeking behavior. Likewise, a study carried out by Cepeda-Benito and Short have found a positive interaction between psychological distress, attitudes towards searching psychological counseling, present social support and self concealment. Vogel and Armstrong's research (2010) which is about the university students' psychological, academic, career problems indicates that self-concealment predicts the help seeking willingness.

In another study testing Cramer's help seeking model, the relationship between psychological distress, attitudes towards psychological counseling, social support, and self concealment; and students' help seeking decisions have been tried to be

explained. It was found that individuals seek psychological counseling more when their psychological distress level increases and when their attitude towards psychological counseling is more positive. On the other hand, an increase in the psychological distress level has been identified when individuals' social support network is degraded and when they chose not to share information about their negative feelings (Cramer, 1999).

In another study where Cramer's help seeking model has been tested on Asian and Asian-American students, behavioral acculturation and commitment to Asian values have been added to the model; and the model has shown compatibility for both samples (Lioa et al., 2005). Moreover, in the study carried out by Cepeda-Benito and Short (1998), a significant interaction between distress, attitudes towards psychological counseling, social support, self concealment and help seeking have been found. On the other hand, Kelly and Achter (1995) have found that individual's self concealment level and attitudes towards help seeking to be predicates for help seeking behavior.

Purpose

This study investigates factors affecting the help seeking behavior of Turkish college students in light of the previous research conducted in this area and the models explaining help seeking behavior (willingness to seek counseling). As it can be seen from the literature presented; the help seeking behavior of individuals are affected by variables such as their sex roles, problem areas, social support, self concealment and attitudes towards help seeking. Apart from these; various studies in this area has also shown that variables like experience with psychological services (Solberg, Samira, Betsy, Tata, & Jolly, 1994), gender (Ang, Kam, Tan, & Yau, 2004; Türküm, 2005), age (Aldwin, Sutton, Chiara, & Spiro, 1996), and problem areas (Gates, Pitney, LaFromboise, & Rowe, 1996; Özbay, 1996; Uffelman & Hardin, 2002) are also affecting help seeking behavior. In this study, the effectiveness of these variables in predicating help seeking behavior has been explored (as shown in Fig. 1.).

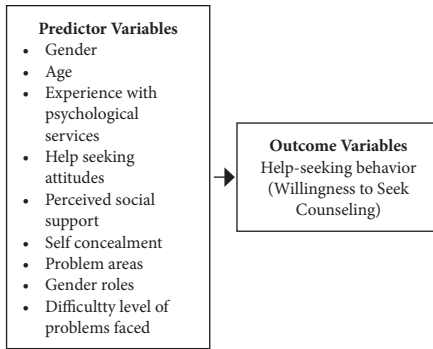


Figure 1.

Predictor and Outcome Variables

Method

Research Model

In the research, the relationship between help seeking behaviors of Turkish college students and some variables have been exhibited and for this purpose a scanning model has been adapted, in which an existing situation is described without being manipulated (Karasar, 1995).

Participants

Regarding the determination of the sample, at least one university from each geographical region of Turkey was opted out and the number of universities selected from each region were determined by ratio of the number of universities in these regions with that of the total number of universities in Turkey. A total of 5829 college students (2974 females, 2841 males, 14 unknown) have participated in the study whose age ranged between 11 and 24.

Instruments

Self Concealment Scale: The adaptation practice of the Self-Concealment Scale developed by Larson and Chastain (1990) to Turkish has been carried out by Terzi, Güngör, and Erdayı (2007). The scale consists of ten items designed according to five point Likert scale. The percentages received in the factor analysis vary between .54 and .82. The divergent validity study executed using the disclosure inventory gave a -.25 correlation coefficient. The cronbach-alpha validity of the scale is .82. The total item correlations differ between .40 and .66. The consistency coefficient attained by the test-retest technique is .72.

Problem Areas Scale: It is a scale created by Cihangir-Çankaya, Saltuk, and Sürücü (2007) that includes ten items designed according to the five point Likert scale. The scale enables a single assessments as well as total assessments by summing up the points gathered by single items from the scale. It was found that the factor loadings of the scale change between .33 and .70. A .72 level correlation has been found between the problem areas scale and the self evaluation scale (Özbay, 1997). Total item correlation of the scale has been found to differ between .24 and .58. The inner consistency of the scale is .76. The consistency coefficient attained by the test-retest technique is .77.

Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale: The scale is created by Cihangir-Çankaya et al. (2007) that includes ten items designed in accordance with the five point Likert scale. It was found that the factor loads of the scale changed between .62 and .85. The correlation between total points of the Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale and the Attitudes Towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-K (Türküm, 2004) has been found to be .42; moreover, the correlation with the positive attitude dimension is .47 whereas with the negative attitude dimension it is -.07. It was found that the total item correlations of the scale changed between .57 and .79. The inner consistency coefficient of the scale is .92. The consistency coefficient attained by the test-retest technique is .65.

Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale: The scale was developed by Türküm (2004). This scale which is used to measure individuals' attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help is composed of 18 five point Likert items. The factor analysis of the scale shows that the eighteen items gather up in two factors. The internal consistency coefficient of the first factor, which includes the positive views is .92 whereas the coefficient related to the second factor (negative views) is .77. The total internal consistency of the scale is .90. In order to analyze the scale's distinctive consistency a significant difference has been found in favor of the individuals that received professional psychological help when the points achieved by individuals who received and who did not receive psychological help were compared. The consistency coefficient attained by the test-retest technique is .77.

Multi-Dimensional Perceived Social Support Scale: The scale was developed by Zimet, Powell & Farley (1988). It has been adapted to Turkish (Eker & Arkar, 1995) and its validity and reliability has been tested (Eker, Alkar, & Yıldız, 2001). The

scale is composed of 12 items and each item is assessed using a 7 point likert scale. It was found that the items of the scale were classified three factors. It was found that the sub-scales of the scale correlated with the corresponding sub-scales of the Perceived Social Support Scale; moreover it was also seen that the multi-dimensional social support scale and its sub-scales negatively and significantly correlated with Hopelessness and Loneliness Scales, and symptom checklists. It also appeared that the Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was between .80 and .85 and that the sub-scales of it showed an acceptable inner consistency (Eker et al., 2001).

Bem Sex Role Inventory : Developed by Bem in 1974, the adaptation of the scale to Turkish was made by Kavuncu in 1987. The femininity and masculinity scales consist of 20 adjectives measuring feminine and masculine characteristics. In order to re-test the validity of the scale another study was carried out by Dökmen (1991) and the split-reliability scores for femininity and masculinity has been found as .77 and .71 respectively. In a similar study which he used clichés for sex roles as a scale, close similarities have been found between the femininity and masculinity scales of the Bem Sex Role Inventory and that of sub-scales for femininity and masculinity (femininity, .51; masculinity, .63). In this study the scale tested by Dökmen in terms of its validity and reliability has been used.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The above mentioned data gathering tools have been used by researchers who contributed to the study and they were applied to sample college students in groups. Before the administration, students were instructed about the goals of the research and how they should answer the items in the scales. In the analysis of the data, the SPSS 11.0 program and multi-hierarchic regression analysis technique has been used; and the evaluation of the results were based on the 0.05 relevance level.

Results

Multiple hierarchic regression analysis has been conducted to determine the variables related to help seeking behavior (willingness to seek counseling) of college students. The study seeks to assess whether student points received from the independent variables of the study predicated the points for willingness to seek psychological help. A regression model with regards to psychological

help seeking has been obtained as a result of the multi-regression analysis.

The first step of the analysis has been constituted of gender, age and experience with psychological services. The second step variables included problem area (academic, family, friends, economic status, accommodation, romantic relationships, emotions, drug use, personality and sexual problems) related variables. The third step variables composed of social support (family, friends and special person) variables. The fifth step variables included variables related to self-concealment and the sixth step included positive and negative attitude variables related to psychological help.

The second step variables that are gender, age, and experience with social services indicate a high-level correlation with points related to willingness to seek help ($R^2=.07$; $F(p)= 144.686 (.000)$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β) the order of significance of predicate variables in relation to points related to willingness to seek help are being a female ($\beta=.09$, $t(p) = 6.335 (.001)$), previous experience with psychological services ($\beta=.08$, $t(p) = 7.187 (.001)$) and age ($\beta=.05$, $t(p) = 4.061 (.001)$). The second step, on the other hand, shows a significant relationship between variables related to problem areas (academic, family, friends, economic, accommodation, romantic, emotional, drug use, personality and sexual problems) and willingness to seek help points ($R^2=.08$; $F(p)= 40.641 (.000)$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β) the order of significance of predicate variables in relation to points related to willingness to seek help are sexual problems ($\beta=.07$, $t(p)= 5.055 (.001)$), familial problems ($\beta=.05$, $t(p)= 1.606 (.108)$), personality problems ($\beta=.04$, $t(p)= 2.670 (.008)$), problems related to romantic relationships ($\beta=.03$, $t(p)= 2.125 (.034)$), and academic problems ($\beta=-.03$, $t(p)= 2.246 (.025)$). On the other hand it was found that statistically, friends, economic status, accommodation, emotions and drug use are not significant predicates for willingness to seek help. In the third step, variables related to social support did show a meaningful correlation with willingness to seek help points ($R^2=.11$; $F(p)= 41.402 (.000)$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β) social support from a special person (e.g. flirt, affianced, fiancée, relative, neighbor) predicate the willingness to seek help points. On the other hand, it was found that some social support (i.e. family and friends) variables are statistically not predictors. In the fourth step, the self concealment variable shows a significant relationship with willingness to seek

help points ($R^2=.11$; $F(p)= 41.402 (.000)$). Gender roles (femininity and masculinity) in the fifth step also show an important relationship to willingness to seek help points ($R^2=.12$; $F(p)= 40.557 (.000)$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β) feminine gender roles ($\beta=.06$, $t(p)= 5.125 (.001)$) as a variable predicates with willingness to seek help points. Statistically, masculine gender roles are not a predictor.

In the sixth step the positive and negative attitudes towards psychological help seeking show a meaningful relationship with willingness to seek help points ($R^2=.26$; $F(p)= 96.633 (.000)$). According to the standardized regression coefficient (β), positive attitudes towards help seeking, as one of the variables, predicates with the willingness to seek help points. On the other hand, negative attitudes towards psychological help seeking are statistically not a predictor.

In the last model, points gathered from all the independent variables that are included in the regression meaningfully predicated the voluntary psychological help seeking points ($R^2=.26$; $F=96.633$; $p<.001$). This finding shows that independent variables explain 26% of the total variance calculated from the total points related to psychological help seeking. The t-test results show that out of the 21 variables, positive attitudes towards psychological help ($\beta=.41$ $t(p)= 33.114 (.001)$) is the most significant predictor of willingness to seek help. The rest of the variables according to their order of significance are: gender (female) ($\beta=.09$ $t(p)= 6.335 (.001)$), experience with psychological services ($\beta=.08$ $t(p)= 7.187 (.001)$), sexual problems ($\beta=.07$ $t(p)= 5.055 (.001)$), feminine gender roles ($\beta=.06$ $t(p)= 5.125 (.001)$), social support from a special person ($\beta=.05$ $t(p)= 4.131 (.001)$), age ($\beta=.05$ $t(p)= 4.061 (.001)$), familial problems ($\beta=.04$ $t(p)= 1.606 (.108)$), personality problems ($\beta=.04$ $t(p)= 2.670 (.008)$), problems related to romantic relationships ($\beta=.03$ $t(p)= 2.125 (.034)$), and academic problems ($\beta=-.03$ $t(p)= 2.246 (.025)$).

Discussion

In the multiple regression analysis, the effects of independent variables (help seeking behavior, problem areas, self-concealment, perceived social support, gender roles, gender, age, experience with psychological services) on help seeking attitudes, which is a dependent variable of the help seeking model. The analysis has shown that there is a linear link between dependent and independent vari-

ables and that the points showed a normal distribution. Multiple hierarchic regression analysis has been conducted to determine the variables related to help seeking behavior of college students. The study seeks to assess whether student points received from the independent variables of the study predicated the points for willingness to seek psychological help. A regression model with regards to psychological help seeking has been obtained as a result of the multi-regression analysis.

According to the findings of the study show that the variables, which predicate the psychological help seeking among college students, in order of significance are: attitudes toward psychological help, gender, experience with psychological services, sexual problems, gender roles, social support received from the special person, age, familial problems, personality problems, problems related to romantic relationships, and academic problems. The results show that the most significant predictor of college students' willingness to seeking psychological help level is positive attitudes towards seeking psychological help. Similar results were also found in studies that focused on willingness to seek help and attitudes towards help seeking (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Leech, 2007; Vogel, Wade, & Hacker, 2007).

The research has shown that female students are more willing to seek help. Previous research studying the link between gender and attitudes towards help seeking also support the finding that females have more positive tendencies with regards to seeking psychological help (Kessler, Brown, & Boman, 1981; McKay, Rutherford, Cacciola, & Kabaskalian-McKay, 1996; Özbay, 1997; Padesky & Hammen, 1981; Thom 1986). Gender predicating the help seeking attitudes, in other words; women being more open to seeking help compared to men when faced with a problem, can be explained by their preference not to deal with their problems themselves. Besides, certain characteristics of Turkish females' such as being sympathetic, being passive, being emotional, and being sensitive towards other people's emotions should be reinforced. On the other hand, being aggressive, acting logically, getting over problems easily, being strong and independent characteristics should be reinforced in boys (Kısaç, 1999). Such differences in raising boys and girls may be affecting the help seeking attitudes in terms of gender. Moreover, the disclosure attitudes of boys and girls also show differences, girls tend to open themselves to someone more compared to boys (Öz, 1999; Selçuk, 1989). The differences in disclosure related to gender may also account for

help seeking attitudes. This is because there is a positive correlation between help seeking attitudes and self-opening attitudes (Vogel & Wester, 2005).

Furthermore, it was discovered that students that have experience with psychological services were more willing to seek help. Previous studies (Al-Rowaie, 2001; Dadfar & Friedlander, 1982; Masuda, Suzumura, Beauchamp, Howells, & Clay, 2005; Rickwood, Deane, Coralie, & Ciarrochi, 2005; Türküm, 2005) correlate this finding that students with prior experience with psychological services are more willing seek help or have more positive attitudes towards help seeking compared to those who did not. Positive experiences with psychological services and knowledge of the procedures involved can be said to account for this finding.

Moreover, problem areas, (academic, family, friends, economic status, accommodation, romantic relationships, emotions, drug use, personality problems and sexual problems) has shown a high degree of correlation with help seeking attitudes. The order of significance of predicate variables on willingness to seek help points is: sexual problems, familial problems, personality problems, problems related to romantic relationships, and academic problems. Statistical findings showed that friends, economic status, accommodation, emotions and drug use were not predicates of help seeking behavior. Previous literature in the field also supports this finding; for example Özbay (1998) has found that individuals with familial, academic and occupational problems tended to seek more help whereas those with interpersonal and neurotic problems tended to seek less professional help. Moreover, in their study, Uffelman and Hardin (2002) have identified the problems that led to urgent seek of help by college students as, in the order of significance: sexual/physical abuse, thoughts about suicide, academic problems, drug addiction, harassment, self-confidence, depression, eating disorder, and sexual accommodation. It was also found that individuals who saw these problems as urgent tended to seek psychological help more. On the other hand, when we think of the developmental stage college students are in; that is in between adolescence and young adulthood, it is normal that they experience sexual, familial, personality problems as well as problems related to romantic relationships. They further face difficulties related to their academic life brought by college education. Therefore, it is logical to think that they will be more willing to receive professional help to cope with their problems.

Gender roles (femininity and masculinity) showed

a considerable relationship with voluntariness to help seeking. According to the standardized regression coefficient (β), female gender roles predicate points related to willingness to seek help. On the other hand, male gender roles statistically are not predicates of help seeking behavior; and there is literature present that support this finding (Johnson, 2001; Pederson & Vogel, 2007; Sipps ve Joneczek, 1986; Wisch, Mahalik, Hayes, & Nutt, 1995).

Variables related to social support (family, friends and special person) also show a positive correlation with willingness to seek help points. Statistical analysis has indicated that out of the three variables related to social support only support from a special person is a predicate for help seeking behavior. In other words, the voluntariness of a person to help seeking is more significant when that help comes from a special person. Relevant literature (Birkel & Reppucci, 1983; Bosmajian & Mattson, 1980; Linn & McGranahan, 1980) also shows that people receiving even a minor support from their social environment are more inclined to receive professional help; however, no previous research related to social support from a special person could be found. This finding can be explained by the relationship with a special person averting relationships with other people in the social environment.

The study has also shown that as individuals get older they become more open to help seeking. Previous research (Aldwin et al., 1996; Kliever, Lepora, Broquet, & Zuba, 1990) has also supported this finding that age and adulthood positively affect help seeking attitudes. This can be explained by the fact that as a person ages the problems related to his or her developmental stages become more complex and therefore he or she will be more willing to seek help from specialists in order to tackle his or her problems.

In the model, the self concealment variable that was seen as a predicate did not show any significance related to help seeking behavior. Moreover, this finding does not show consistency with previous research. There are studies that show a negative correlation between self-concealment and help seeking attitudes. In a study (Barry & Mirzahi, 2005) examining voluntariness to seek help and self-concealment, it was found that self-concealment negatively correlated with help seeking behavior. Similarly, Rochlen, Mohr, and Hargrove (1999) indicated that individual with high self-concealment levels tended to avoid sharing their personal information and therefore act less willing to seeking professional help. When we think of voluntariness to help seek-

ing in terms of receiving help from a professional; we see that the self-concealment characteristics of Turkish College students are not significant when this help may come from a professional. Further study on Turkish students related to this variable can ease analyses in this respect.

Finally, statistics shows that points gathered from the variables of the regression model have predicated willingness to help seeking points. This finding shows that independent variables can be regarded as explaining the 26% variance related to the help seeking behavior points. The t-test scores show that "positive attitudes towards psychological help" is the most powerful predicate of help seeking behavior; followed by problems related to gender, previous professional help, sex, gender roles, social support, age, family, personal problems, romantic relationships and academic problems. Most of the findings of this research are supported by previous literature in the field, but as it was indicated before some are not. These findings are approached and discussed in light of the constituents of the Turkish culture; in this way it will be possible to reassess our findings, which either correlated or not correlated with previous research, in new studies carried out in different cultures and on Turkish students.

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